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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000057

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/WE (MENNUTI); AF/S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2006

TAGS: PGOV PREL AN VT

SUBJECT: SANT'EGIDIO/UNITA TALKING PEACE

REF: 01VATICAN 4030

CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE MERANTE, REASON E.O. 12958 1.5 (B,D)

¶11. (C) IN AN ASIDE TO POLOFF BEFORE A 12/20/01 MEETING WITH S/E DANFORTH TO DISCUSS SUDAN PEACE INITIATIVES (REPORTED SEPTEL), SANT'EGIDIO SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR AND AFRICA HAND DON MATTEO ZUPPI RELATED HIS RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH UNITA LEADER SAVIMBI AND LOCAL UNITA REP. ZUPPI, A FLUENT

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PORTUGUESE SPEAKER WITH LONG EXPERIENCE IN AFRICA, HAS BEEN ACTIVELY PRESSING UNITA CONTACTS TO OFFER A MEANINGFUL CEASEFIRE SINCE BEFORE HIS APPEAL FOR USG SUPPORT (REPORTED REFTEL) SOME MONTHS AGO. HE TOLD POLOFF THAT SAVIMBI HAD INDICATED TO HIM DURING A PHONE CONVERSATION TWO WEEKS BEFORE CHRISTMAS THAT UNITA, AS A CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURE, WOULD OFFER A UNILATERAL THREE-MONTH CEASEFIRE STARTING AROUND CHRISTMAS. ACCORDING TO ZUPPI, SAVIMBI ONLY NEEDED TO CONSULT WITH HIS "GENERALS" BEFORE ANNOUNCING IT.

¶12. (C) ZUPPI SAID HE LATER SPOKE WITH THE UNITA REPRESENTATIVE IN ROME, WHO TOLD HIM THAT IN A PRE-CHRISTMAS TELEVISION INTERVIEW ANGOLAN PRESIDENT CHIASSANO HAD MADE SCATHING REMARKS ABOUT DRIVING THE UNITA REBELS INTO THE SEA, THUS MAKING SAVIMBI'S OFFER HARDER TO CARRY OUT. ZUPPI SPECULATED THAT BOTH CHIASSANO AND SAVIMBI WERE MORE "PRIMITIVE" THAN HAD BEEN HIS INTERLOCUTORS IN MOZAMBIQUE, AND THAT THEIR RHETORIC FREQUENTLY HAMPERS MOVEMENT TOWARD A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. NEVERTHELESS, MATTEO AVERRED, WITH A LITTLE PUSH FROM OUTSIDE HE BELIEVED THE ANGOLANS COULD DUPLICATE THE MOZAMBIQUE EXPERIENCE (I.E. AN OFF-SITE DIALOGUE LEADING TO A PEACE AGREEMENT, MEDIATED BY SANT'EGIDIO).

¶13. (C) QUERIED ABOUT THE ANGOLAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' RECENT CALLS FOR A PEACE DIALOGUE, ZUPPI RESPONDED THAT THEY WERE WELL MEANING BUT EQUALLY UNSOPHISTICATED, AND WEAK. HE NOTED THAT THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO OFFER BEYOND THEIR APPEAL; WHAT THEY NEEDED WAS AN ACTION PLAN.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: AFTER REFTEL CONVERSATION, WE WERE

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PLEASANTLY SURPRISED TO HEAR THAT DON MATTEO HAD SPOKEN DIRECTLY WITH SAVIMBI ABOUT A UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE. WE ASKED WHETHER THE THREE- MONTH TIMEFRAME MIGHT HAVE BEEN TOO AMBITIOUS; ZUPPI APPEARED TO US PATIENT, BUT FIRM IN HIS INTENT TO KEEP PROBING SAVIMBI FOR WHAT HE CALLED A MEANINGFUL GESTURE. WE LEAVE IT TO THOSE MORE FULLY KNOWLEDGEABLE OF THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF THE PARTIES TO DECIDE WHETHER THESE CONVERSATIONS POINT TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A BREAKTHROUGH -- ALTHOUGH WE HASTEN TO ADD IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN A WEEK SINCE CHRISTMAS AND WE HAVE NOT SEEN ANY REPORT OF AN ANGOLA CEASEFIRE.

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